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Moving Beyond Appalachia: Social Mobility in J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*

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Abstract. This paper examines J. D. Vance's memoir *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016a), hereafter HE, as a narrative of upward mobility, which invokes Vance himself as a hillbilly character, who achieves to move out from the secluded Appalachian cities of Middletown, Ohio and Jackson, Kentucky to the more symbolically, intellectually and socio-economically central and emancipating settings such as the US Marine Corps, Ohio State University, Yale Law School and Silicon Valley investment firm. I will discuss how Vance offers a rugged, alienating, and agitated reading of his mobility and thereby complicates, deepens, and adds new angles to the concept of mobility. At the same time, I will analyze how Vance's memoir asserts the capability of a hillbilly to be an economically, socially, and intellectually mobile subject, steering his destiny. Namely, Appalachians are not necessarily the stagnant and regressive other of white America as they can exist beyond the "poor, backward, lazy, violent and alcoholic" hillbilly stereotype. Thus, Vance, to some extent, achieves to show that the gap between the upper-class urban US and working-class rural Appalachia can be bridged. Ultimately, with specific attention to Vance's mobility and the direct confrontation of discourses of poor white trash, hillbilly and Appalachia, this article reveals how Vance's memoir marks a significant and unique attempt to complicate the pathological elements of the region's master-images and show how poor white people should be viewed with the potency to move and venture beyond the prescribed boundaries of the worlds to which they are bound.

Key words: Appalachia, the Hillbilly stereotype, white trash, working-class whites, class mobility, American dream, mobility studies

1. A Brief History of White Trash and the Hillbilly Stereotype

In *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*, Nancy Isenberg traces the history of the concept "white trash" to America's early colonial period. Initially, known as "waste people," "white trash," refers to poor white people, especially in the rural southern United States, who are stigmatized as being unable "to be

productive, to own property, or to produce healthy and upwardly mobile children—the sense of uplift on which the American dream is predicated" (2017, xxvii). Along this line, Jeff Forret in *Race Relations at the Margins* states that southern poor whites were seen as "idle, lazy and indolent; ignorant, uneducated and suspicious; impoverished and malnourished; dirty and disease-ridden; as well as drunken and immoral" (2006, 2). According to Matt Wray, although African Americans coined the term to refer to non-slaveholding whites, the socioeconomically advantaged whites proliferated and circulated its usage: "[i]t was the literate, middle-class and elite whites who invested [the term's] meaning with social power, granting it the powers of social stigma and prejudice enforcing its discriminatory effects" (1997, 42). Poor whites were blamed for their material circumstances and easily set apart from productive society. In other words, the privileged whites otherized, demonized, and ostracized poor whites for downgrading white race which stands for power, affluence and upward mobility. As Lisa R. Pruitt, in her article "Welfare Queens and White Trash" states, poor whites "remain firmly 'othered,' an out-group whose existence wider white society would rather not acknowledge, let alone assist" (2016, 295). Notably, there is a disparity between the rich, or the mainstream Americans and the poor whites of Appalachia. The American public believes "Appalachia is in America but not of America" (Billings et al. 2001, x). In her collections of essays, *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class and Literature*, Dorothy Allison, a southern white working-class writer, states that the stereotype of white trash and the division between the rich and the poor have been so inculcated in the minds of the poor whites that they have internalized it:

> [I was] taught to believe myself of not much value, to take damage and ignore it, to take damage and be proud of it. We were taught to be proud we were not Black, and ashamed we were poor, taught to reject everything people believed about us—drunken, no-count, lazy, whorish, stupid—and still some of it was just the way we were. The lies went to the bone, and digging them out has been the work of a lifetime. (1994, 225)

The negative cultural representations of the poor whites have long-lasting detrimental effects on them which translate into feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, lack of self-confidence and further separation from the rest of the US. This is true for Vance himself. Although he is white, he asserts that such a label does not account for his true background. He does not identify with the WASPs of the Northeast, instead; he identifies with the working-class Scots-Irish Americans who American society commonly refers to as hillbillies, rednecks or white trash. To Vance, they are neighbors, friends, and family (*HE* 3).

The white trash stigma overlaps with the hillbilly stereotype. In other words, if someone is a hillbilly, he is considered white trash. Hillbilly is a term for people who dwell in the mountainous areas in the United States, primarily in southern Appalachia. Anthony Harkins in *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* states hillbillies are "Protestant Americans of supposedly pure Anglo-Saxon or at least Scotch-Irish lineage" (2004, 7). Harkins (2004) points out that representations of hillbillies appeared in public culture in the early twentieth century and become "one of the most lasting and pervasive images in American popular iconography, appearing continuously throughout the twentieth century in nearly every major facet of American popular culture from

novels and magazines to movies and television programs to country music and the Internet" (3). Harkins (2004) further observes that although hillbillies are sometimes associated with positive traits such as "romantic rurality, cultural and ethnic purity, pioneer heritage, and personal and communal independence and self-sufficiency" (6), generally, they are depicted as "lazy, slovenly, degenerate people who endure wrenching but always comic poverty, embody an uncivilized state of raw physicality and sexuality, and possess an almost superhuman fecundity" (19), characteristics or behaviors that are attached likewise to white trash people. Stephen Fisher in "Folk Culture or Folk Tale" concludes that researchers of the Appalachian folk rarely focus on the positive aspects associated with the subculture, that is, "neighborliness and hospitality, love of place, modesty, bravery, sense of humor, loyalty, resourcefulness, patriotism...placing a higher value on people over objects, continuity over change" (1977, 18). As Fisher (1977) points out and Vance's memoir shows, the white trash concept or the hillbilly figure is an ideological and cultural construct that is one-sided, unstable, waiting to be deconstructed.

In fact, some scholars criticize Vance himself for perpetuating the white trash and hillbilly stereotypes in his memoir. Written in direct response to *HE*, Elizabeth Catte's *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* (2018) and *Appalachian Reckoning*: *A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy* (2019), edited by Anthony Harkins and Meredith McCarroll, for instance, reprehend Vance for making broad generalizations about Appalachia. However, as someone who self-identifies as a hillbilly, Vance in his interview with Brian Lamb (Vance 2016b), states that "one of the things I tried to write about in the book is that a lot of these stereotypes of hillbillies aren't necessarily totally fair" (22:11-22:15). He continues: "what I do try to point out in the book is that a lot of these problems that maybe we perceive as stereotypes, they don't exist in everybody. They don't even exist in most people, but they're certainly there. The family chaos, the breakdown, the drug addiction, these problems exist in a disproportionate level in our community and we got to be open about it if we ever want to change direction" (22:31-22:50). Although Vance is also criticized for accusing hillbillies of their lack of agency and initiation in combatting poverty, again, in his interview with Lamb, Vance emphasizes that poverty is not "a problem that could be solved entirely by personal agency. I'm not an up from my bootstraps kind of guy. I'm not the kind of guy who said I'm going to work hard and make it and I went ahead and did it" (52:49-52:59). Vance states that "poverty and inequality are both structural but also cultural problems (55:59-56:02). Namely, for Vance, poverty is a product of not only cultural tradition, personal choice and responsibility, but also systemic societal problems and economic inequalities.

The above-mentioned rebuttals are essential as they complicate, diversify and revivify the region and its inhabitants; however, as Vance points out, his autobiographical account tells his success story, his first-hand anecdotal experience with his hillbilly family and relatives. Therefore, his writing cannot be seen as addressing a group of people as a whole. In *HE*, he shows that, "[t]his is not an academic study" (8) "[n]or am I unbiased observer" (9). Moreover, in an interview with Elliot Gerson (Vance 2017), he states that:

> [*HE*] is about my primarily my two grandparents. I sort of think of it as this extended love letter to my grandparents and so it means hillbilly in a very specific way because those are the two hillbillies that really made a difference in my life and an elegy going on back to, you know, also is just sort of a sad, a sad lament both for the two people

> who I really miss and I really were important for me but also for I think a broader community that's really struggling. (1:10:44-1:11:11)

I suggest that through his memoir, Vance makes an important step toward linking and raising awareness about discourses of mobility, Appalachia, white poverty and cross-class relations and the contradictions of class in the United States, which have been either insufficiently examined or ignored in contemporary critical discourse.

2. *HILLBILLY ELEGY: A MEMOIR OF A FAMILY AND CULTURE IN CRISIS* AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

A New York Times best-seller for weeks beginning in 2016, Vance's *HE*, is an interesting personal account of growing up between Appalachian cities of Middletown, Ohio and Jackson, Kentucky. Vance tells his journey from a hardscrabble Ohio childhood, barely passing his classes, to Yale Law School graduate. His memoir offers a window into one hillbilly family's journey of hardships, survival and triumph. Following three generations through their unique struggles, his story explores the highs and lows that define his family experience. It tells the story of how a family navigated economic hardships, violence, abuse, addiction and these cycles of dysfunction, and yet came out on the other side in a healthier and more constructive place and how that can happen. His autobiographical account reasserts the hillbilly as a potentially economically, socially and culturally mobile subject.

Throughout his memoir, Vance explains why it is so difficult to be socially mobile in poor Appalachia. He talks about the reasons of immobility. Behind their poorness and backwardness, Vance pinpoints structural and cultural factors. According to him, the poverty of hillbillies partially results from economic abandonment and lack of economic opportunities: "For many, part-time work is all they have access to, because the Armcos of the world are going out of business and their skill sets don't fit in the modern economy" (58). Also, as part of the population's inability to attain upward mobility, he explains families are trapped in increasingly destitute living conditions because of the declining housing market. After Presidents Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush both implemented policies encouraging homeownership, many Middletown residents bought houses that have now accumulated so much debt that they cannot sell them because nobody would want to pay off so much of somebody else's mortgage (52).

Most importantly, Vance states that lack of aspiration and ambition results in negative or downward mobility in the hillbillies. They rail against the unfairness of life and how hard it is to get a good job, but then fail to show up to work without giving advance notice or disdain the available job. He tells a story about a boy and his pregnant girlfriend, who either missed work or were chronically late. When they were laid off, the boy lashed out at his manager: "How could you do this to me? Don't you know I've got a pregnant girlfriend?" (6) Vance is unsatisfied with this attitude and highlights the blindness of these people to their own contributions to the failure and miseries of their lives. He concludes that the government or immediate structures of power cannot fix everything.

With its ups and downs, trials and tribulations, ebbs and flows, mobility is characteristic to Vance's family. His ancestors are among the many Scots-Irish who

settled in the Appalachians in the eighteenth century. The most recent mobility in Vance's family, however, begins with his grandparents, who he calls Papaw and Mamaw. Married as teenagers in Jackson, in 1947, they uprooted themselves from rural Kentucky and moved to Middletown, Ohio, in search of a better life (21). Papaw knows that "the best way up for the hillbilly was out" (29). He gets a job at Armco, a steel factory that brings his grandparents from the hills of Kentucky into America's middle class (55). Papaw earns a good wage despite a lack of formal education. The anticipation that geographic mobility leads to class mobility does not exactly materialize in Vance's grandparents, though. Although "Within two generations, the transplanted hillbillies had largely caught up to the native population in terms of income and poverty level" (36), for decades, his grandparents have struggled in their new life. Vance writes, "Economic mobility came with a lot of pressures, and it came with a lot of new responsibilities" (30). Back in Jackson, they are resented because they are getting "'too big for [their] britches'-to describe those who think they're better than the stock they came from" (30) and in their new city many of their neighbors view them suspiciously because they have too many children, and they welcome their extended families into their homes for too long (31). Ostensibly, Vance's grandparents suffer condescension and discrimination from their established middle-class neighbors, and back at home, they are treated as class traitors. Vance draws attention to cultural clashes and differences within white Americans, which make upward mobility apparently impossible for Vance's grandparents.

Unable to balance these two different worlds, Vance's grandparents fall back into bad old habits. Papaw stays out more. He seems to resist the social expectations of a middle-class father (42). While he is "a violent drunk" Mamaw is "a violent nondrunk" who devotes herself to making his drunken life a living hell (43). Moving out and economic mobility do not bring much success for Papaw's and Mamaw's children, either. In fact, one of the reasons why Vance's grandparents move out of Kentucky is to "give their kids a head start" (36). They think that if they could go from a one-room schoolhouse in Jackson to a two-story suburban home with the comforts of the middle class, then their children and grandchildren should have no problem attending college and acquiring a share of the American dream (44). But it does not quite work out that way. According to Vance, they are naïve about that attitude because their tumultuous home life profoundly affects their three children. Although Vance's aunt and uncle find their way, have their careers, his mother does not fare well: "She was eighteen, with no degree, no husband, and a little girl-my sister, Lindsay" (46). Vance comments: "Mamaw and Papaw may have made it out of Kentucky, but they and their children learned the hard way that Route 23 didn't lead where they hoped" (37).

Vance's mother's drug addiction, too-early pregnancies and ever-changing boyfriends precipitate her downward mobility. Vance argues that the turbulent domestic disputes of Mamaw and Papaw have had their toll on his mother, who grows into an abusive and argumentative woman unable to live without drugs and romantic partners. Yet, she is able to earn a nursing degree (although she later loses her license) and she is always ready to go to drug rehab. Furthermore, she drills the importance of reading and education into Vance, providing him with books and a library card, showing him how to use it, and always making sure he has access to kids' books at home (60). Through his portrayal of his mother, Vance lends a holistic view of her and counteracts ideas of homogeneity in the people. He renders her complex and relatable, and most importantly, redeemable.

Born in 1984 into an unstable and violent home, Vance's prospects are also "grim:" "The statistics tell you that kids like me face a grim future-that if they're lucky, they'll manage to avoid welfare; and if they're unlucky, they'll die of a heroin overdose, as happened to dozens in my small hometown just last year" (2). At his mother's house, he experiences chaos, fighting, violence, drugs, and a great deal of instability (122). Mostly, his sister Lindsay, his aunts and uncles provide him some sense of comfort and safety. But it is his Mamaw who helps him during these hard times.

Vance states that his grandparents believe that hard work mattered more than anything else: "They knew that life was a struggle, and though the odds were a bit longer for people like them, that fact didn't excuse failure" (36). Mamaw has done everything in her power to be better than the circumstances of her birth. Though she is hardly rich, she wants her kids to get an education, get white-collar work, and marry well-groomed middle-class people (62). Papaw tells Vance, **"**'Your generation will make its living with their minds, not their hands'" (55). They make sure he learns math and they check on his grades. They tell Vance that "[t]o move up was to move on. That required going to college" (56). And Mamaw repeatedly reminds him: "Never be like these fucking losers who think the deck is stacked against them. You can do anything you want to" (36). Vance writes, "[t]hey spent the last two decades of their lives showing me the value of love and stability and teaching me the life lessons that most people learn from their parents. Both did their part to ensure that I had the self-confidence and the right opportunities to get a fair shot at American Dream." (23). Vance's grandparents' belief in hard work, education and American dream demystifies another popular belief that hillbillies are backward, indolent, ignorant and dumb. Papaw and especially Mamaw do not want to perpetuate the white trash, working-class lifestyle. Therefore, they help Vance step outside of the white trash boundary and claim his share of American dream.

Throughout his memoir, although Vance acknowledges his family's history of domestic violence, drug abuse and lack of cultural mobility, he also focuses on praiseworthy hillbilly values such as family honor, industriousness, loyalty and kinship. For instance, when a hearse would pass on the street, everybody without exception would stop, stand at attention "'[b]ecause, honey, we're hill people. And we respect our dead'" (12). Thus, Vance's memoir dismantles the wholesale negative aspects of white trash and creates an alternative portrayal of poor white life, presenting poor whites as any other group of society with their flaws and also virtues. Also, there are redemptive qualities within the hillbillies. They try to beat their demons, educate and rehabilitate themselves. Mamaw and Papaw, for example, try to make up for their bad parenting against their own children by taking care of Vance and his sister. Vance attempts to prove that even though the outside community sees little value in hillbilly society, that society is not as morally deficient as the stereotype would suggest. Vance's family meets and yet transcends their stereotypical characterization; they foster a sense of solidarity, loyalty and love and they are at their greatest when they show their loyalty. Vance, thus, destigmatizes the hillbilly conception in the American imagination.

After Papaw's death, Mamaw steps in entirely and takes Vance under her own wings. Vance writes that Mamaw's life has been a constant struggle: From poverty to eight miscarriages, from Papaw's alcohol abuse to her daughter's drug abuse, Mamaw has had spent the better part of her seven decades managing crises. And now, when most people her age enjoy the fruits of retirement, she is raising two teenage grandchildren, namely Vance and his sister (113). Vance states that Mamaw is a hard woman to live with. She

constantly reminds Vance that unless he studied, he would amount to nothing (132). Furthermore, "[t]here were three rules in her house: Get good grades, get a job, and 'get off your ass and help me'" (133) and Mamaw forces him to take a job because he "needed to learn the value of a dollar" (138). Vance's memories of Mamaw's home are full of happy ones, though. Her home is a haven- a place for emotional healing and intellectual activity. She creates a stable, loving and safe space that prepares Vance to subvert the boundaries of the hillbilly stereotype and learn that being a member of a hillbilly culture does not have to mean blindly adopting all of its characteristics. Moreover, it is Mamaw who instills a strong work ethic into Vance and helps him throw off the fetters of white trash expected behavior, such as laziness, tardiness and experimentations with drugs. For instance, Mamaw forbids Vance meeting with his drug-using friends in seventh grade, threatening to run them over with her car if she sees him with them. "'No one would ever find out,'" she whispers threateningly (154).

At first sight, Mamaw's life, use of offensive words, and "gun-toting, cigarette-smoking" (63) habits locate her somewhat inside the hillbilly stigma who is stereotypically portrayed as

> a socially isolated woman whose role choices are limited to those of homemaker and mother except in the face of serious economic necessity. She is seldom self-assertive and chooses to avoid problematic situations. She may be content with her lot in life or fatalistic about God's will. There is a high probability that she is dependent, at some time, on community social services and has more children than the national average. At various times in her life, she may exhibit symptoms related to chronic stress and depression. She may become the victim of family violence and yet be unable to act decisively for herself. Her inexperience in the larger social world makes it difficult for her to deal with impersonal representatives of assisting agencies. (Fiene 1988, 68)

Although Mamaw embodies some of the hillbilly traits, to a large extent, she unfolds before the reader as wise, perceptive, progressive-minded and achievement-oriented. Her resiliency, intuition and ability to tackle crises pull apart preexisting conceptions about women in Appalachia. She evokes admiration and compassion for the struggles and sacrifices she makes for her family. Throughout *HE*, Vance praises the matriarch of his family, embraces her hillbilliness and at the same time challenges commonly held notions of what it means to be a hillbilly.

When Mamaw insists Vance go to college, he begins to realize his academic shortcomings. He is unprepared for a college education and decides to enlist in the Marine Corps. This decision is a turning point in his life because for the first time in his life, when he is eighteen years old, he moves out of "Middletown's world of small expectations" and constant chaos (163). In fact, he gets the opportunity to start reconstructing his own subjectivity. During the next four years, the Marines teaches him "learned willfulness" which is antithetical to what he learned at home: "learned helplessness" (163). That is, Vance's working-class milieu taught him that he was helpless and no matter what he did, he would not be able to change anything. They would ask: "if you think it's hard to get ahead even when you try, then why try at all?" (193) The Marines, on the other hand, teaches him that he has a willful influence and control on his own life and destiny. Furthermore, he learns how to manage his finances, how to stay fit and disciplined, how to build bonds with people of different social classes and races,

how to lead and how to cope with unexpected challenges. Year over year, he gains self-confidence and a sense of achievement because he has the ability and resources to take responsibility and be the provider of his family. With his savings, Vance recounts, he covers Mamaw's health insurance, takes his mother out to lunch, gets ice cream for his nephews and buys presents for his sister. Significantly, during his four-year stay at the boot camp, letters from his family sustain and encourage him through his hard times. Again, the letters exemplify hillbilly kinship and undying love for their land and family.

After earning the title "marine," Vance goes to Ohio State University: "the gateway for a better life" (189). Working odd jobs and with full-time class load, he graduates from Ohio State in 2009, and steers his wheel to Yale Law School. He says that "For the first time in my life, I felt like an outsider in Middletown. And what turned me into an alien was my optimism" (195). His optimism clashes with the pessimism of Middletown's residents, who are caught in a vicious cycle of drug abuse, family breakups, illegitimate children and dependence on the government. Vance is completely in control of his life in a way that he never has had before.

He gets accepted to Yale Law School and as the first year draws to a close; he feels triumphant: he gets along well with his professors, he has earned solid grades, and he has a dream job for the summer, working for a sitting U.S. senator (202). Despite this, he feels "out of place" at Yale (202). The migration from one class to another is hard. Vance explains that partly it is about his hillbilliness and his professors' and classmates' perceptions of his background: "I went to a mediocre public high school, my parents didn't go to college, and I grew up in Ohio. The same was true of nearly everyone I knew" (204). Even his service in the Marine Corps is strange. At Yale, these things are true of no one. He states that a student survey found that over 95 percent of Yale Law's students qualified as outright wealthy (203). Moreover, he has difficulties in being casual with rich executives and powerful people. For instance, during an infamous dinner at one of New Haven's fanciest restaurants, he does not know the difference between "sauvignon blanc or chardonnay" (211), he spits out sparkling water and wonders why there are three spoons, multiple butter knives and forks at the dinner table (212). Nonetheless, he learns to pass and adapts to his new world well enough to be invited to dinners and interviews. Furthermore, Vance draws attention to the exclusionary politics and "the outsider attitude" of the elites (206). One of his professors, for example, is not open to cross-class relationships. He suggests that Yale Law School should not accept applicants from non-prestigious state schools (206) because "[it's] not our job to do remedial education, and too many of these other kids need it" (202). Joshua Rothman in his article, "The Lives of Poor White People" writes that, according to Vance, the snobbery of the elites "has escalating social and economic costs. Economically, it makes migrating from a depressed area to a growing one both harder and less desirable. Socially, it creates a feedback loop of mutual contempt and increasing division." Therefore, Vance believes that this attitude should change: "One way our upper class can promote upward mobility, then, is not only by pushing wise public policies but by opening their hearts and minds to the newcomers who don't quite belong" (206). Yet, with its so-called fortified borders, Yale is not a hermetically sealed institution: lower classes are welcome. The state offers financial aid, which for low-income students typically makes private Ivy League schools more affordable than public universities. Vance, thus, shows that the border between the elite and the poor can be crossed and he

makes it clear that success is not the property of the wealthy; the lower-classes can also attain it.

While at Yale, Vance learns the importance of social capital, which means that "[t]he networks of people and institutions around us have real economic value. They connect us to the right people, ensure that we have opportunities, and impart valuable information. Without them, we're going it alone" (214). For anyone who wants to attain and retain class mobility, Vance observes, social capital is essential. At Yale, social capital is gained through Yale's social rituals, namely, cocktail receptions, banquets and interviews which are all about "passing a social test-a test of belonging, of holding your on in a corporate boardroom, of making connections with potential future clients" (213). In the end, Vance achieves to network and gather enough social capital to get a job offer from a law firm.

After graduation, Vance recognizes that one can never entirely leave one's identity behind, no matter how far away one tries to get away from it. For instance, when someone at a gas station asks him if he went to Yale, he feels uncomfortable admitting that he had become an Ivy Leaguer. He believes that if he told the truth to this person, he would feel like a traitor to his own home, class and family (205) by leaving them behind. In this moment, Vance illustrates how hard it is to pretend to be somebody he is and he is not. It is difficult for him to accept that he is both a hillbilly and an Ivy Leaguer. Furthermore, although he achieves the American dream, has a nice job, a loving relationship, a recently purchased house, he realizes that some of the mindsets he thought he left behind with his family such as stress, fear, anxiety (224) would follow him. In times of duress, he would shut down or yell or run away or prepare for battle: "the demons of the life we left behind continue to chase us" (2), Vance observes and remembers Mamaw saying: "you can take the boy out of Kentucky, but you can't take Kentucky out of the boy" (25). He sees that a happy partner, home and job "required constant mental focus" (231), patience, trusting conversation, kindness, respect and not lashing out or withdrawal. Transition from hillbilly culture to the affluent middle-class is a constant process of learning, unlearning, change of lifestyle, comportment and adaptation. As a result, Vance learns to sympathize with and forgive his mother. He asks, "How much of our lives, good and bad, should we credit to our personal decisions, and how much is just the inheritance of our culture, our families, and our parents who have failed their children? How much is Mom's life her own fault? Where does blame stop and sympathy begin?" (231) That is, rising up does not necessarily mean turning one's back on one's roots and a seamless adjustment into the new class. Vance's narrative, thus, challenges the mythology of mobility as an inherently liberating phenomenon. Indeed, his experience stands in contrast to the dominant conceptualization of mobility which denotes escape from which circumscribes the individual-the family, home, the culture, the past or whatever is left behind. On the contrary, mobility means a dynamic process of dialogue with one's past, culture, family, and present socio-cultural status.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Complicating simplistic visions that associate Appalachia almost exclusively with decay and poverty, Vance's memoir suggests that people categorized as white trash or hillbillies are not what mainstream society perceives them to be. *HE* exposes the reader to an Appalachia that decays but at the same time one that has the capacity to progress

positively. Furthermore, Vance contributes to unsettle the white trash stigma by setting himself and the people surrounding him as examples of success, happy marriage, having a decent job and thereby breaking down the boundary between the urban, professional-class whites and rural, working-class hillbillies.

Vance's memoir also offers new perspectives on the discourse of mobility. He does not construct his memoir along with the classic pattern of "rags to riches" discourse, which is making one's way up from poverty to financial prosperity through hard work and seizing the opportunities the United States offered to one. According to Vance, social mobility is fraught with complications. He complicates conventions of the American dream journey by arguing that mobility is not a smooth, linear upward trajectory, but a rugged, conflicting and even alienating experience. In *American Road Narratives* Ann Brigham also complicating notions of mobility states that "mobility is not a method of freeing oneself from space, society, or identity but instead the opposite-a mode of engagement" (2015, 4). That is to say, as Vance also insists, mobility is a dynamic issue about coming to terms with–rather than rebellion against–one's identity and the intersecting categories of one's race, ethnicity, class and region.

Furthermore, Vance's narrative of mobility does not entirely celebrate the American notion of self-creation and self-reliance. Vance emphasizes that he has not achieved mobility by "pulling up himself by his own bootstraps." Along with luck and hard work, he credits Mamaw, Papaw, his sister, his aunt, his mentors and the scholarship/grants that the government provided as indispensable factors that enabled his class ascendancy. Vance further argues that social capital is also an essential factor to success and class mobility. Networking, on the trajectory of upward mobility, helps navigate the roadblocks, make the correct decisions and connect with the right people. Most importantly, Vance stresses that poor white mobility and social interaction with upper classes are possible, thus, the hegemonic and the poor white binary can be blurred. In the conclusion of his memoir, although Vance does not offer a solution to the inherent problems of the class system of America, he certainly challenges the status quo by highlighting the fact that poverty is not a fixed social status from which it is impossible to escape, it is an economic situation that can be overcome through a stable home, academically- oriented role models and never giving up on oneself.

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